THE REALIST-IDEALIST DEBATE IN BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHY

Undergraduate Thesis in Philosophy
Honour School of Physics and Philosophy

Matthew Humble

Oxford University
Trinity Term 1999

CONTENTS

PREFACE

This thesis is an attempt to critically examine the major metaphysical claims made in Buddhist philosophy. The methodology applied throughout is firstly to express the central philosophical ideas with as little interpretation as possible. I then attempt to synthesize a coherent philosophical position from the source material, using relevant western philosophy where possible to elucidate key concepts and ideas. In this sense, the thesis is partly an exercise in comparative philosophy.

Having next to no Pali, Sanskrit or Tibetan, I have on the whole simply used the most common English translations of the terms. Unfortunately, every Buddhologist seems to have their own preferred translation of key terms. In order to make the text as readable as possible, I have substituted my preferred translations for the ones given without any flagging when giving quotations from the literature, as it seems entirely unneccessary to the philosophical project to do otherwise.

In the sections where the source texts are Pali (chapters one and two) I have used the Pali terms, and in chapter three I have used the equivalent Sanskrit words. Buddhologists may criticise me for not using the original texts, but in the last ten years good translations have been produced of enough of the major texts I am using as source material to make the project worthwhile. Whether or not this approach is enlightening must be determined by the reader.

Finally, I should say that this thesis has profited immeasurably from conversations with my supervisor Professor Gombrich, Karma Phuntsho, Bob Hargrave, and Rory Madden. The errors that remain are, of course, my own.

PREFACE

INTRODUCTION

Realism and Idealism are terms which are rather difficult to define. The first thing to say is that, of course, they are intended in their philosophical sense. However, they have both been used to denote a wide variety of positions in the history of philosophy, and the same people have been called realist by some, and idealist by others (usually Kant). Both are often used perjoratively. Both positions usually involve ontological claims, and more recently the terms have been applied epistemologically and in theories of perception. However, all these varieties share certain important features.

The central tenet of realism is that there are things which exist independently of the mind. Hence realism implies some gap between our experience or knowledge and the world of physical objects (the 'real' world). Wherever this gap is ontological, it also *a fortiori* produces an epistomological gap between external objects and our perceptions of them. It is possible also to be an ontological monist (say, a materialist) and still be a realist: two such positions are representative realism and direct realism. Both agree that the 'real' world is not the world of our experience, and differ only as to the nature of the link between the 'real' world and the mental world of experience (although, in fact, naïve realism can also be interpreted as a form of idealism).

Idealism is the doctrine that the 'real' world is the world of experience, and hence that reality is in some way mind-dependent or mind-correlated. The main criticism of it is that it has difficulty with accounting for the mind-independence of physical entities. Surely, it is argued, the table is there whether or not it is experienced? While early idealists such as Berkeley notoriously had to postulate God,

as an omniscient being, to counter this argument, more sophisticated idealists have proposed more reasonable solutions. In its favour, idealism has the obvious advantage of removing the epistemological gap between experiential and 'real' worlds, since the two are identified. This prevents, to a greater or lesser extent, the sceptic from getting a foothold.

Buddhist philosophical systems, it will be shown, often contain claims which look similar to positions taken by Western idealists and realists. However, the analogy is never perfect. The major reason for this is the Buddhist concept of soteriology. In the same way as Western philosophers have, until this century, been concerned with God and finding a place for it (however conceived) in their systems (for instance Kant's famous claim that he "found it necessary to deny *knowledge*, in order to make room for *faith*"[1]), Buddhist philosophers have been guided by the need to accommodate the attainment of nirvana in their thought. This leads to a remarkable anthropocentricity, which usually finds its expression in the claim that humans can, if they engage properly in Buddhist practices, perceive the world in ways usually reserved for God in otherwise analogous Western philosophies.

However, given the geographical, socio-political and intellectual divergence between the Occidental and Oriental traditions, what is most noteworthy is the similarity both of the approaches used and of the conclusions reached in them.

The general structure of the thesis is threefold. In chapter one, the metaphysics (or, more accurately, it will be seen, anti-metaphysics) of the Buddha's original teachings, the suttas of the Pali canon, are analysed. I then go on in chapter two to examine Theravādin ontology, through a later systematisation of the abhidhamma of the school. Finally, in chapter three, the metaphysics and epistemology of the

Yogācāra school are scrutinised, again mainly through the medium of the later Indian writings of that tradition.

---

[1] Kant (1929) Bxxx.

1. WHAT THE BUDDHA TAUGHT

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to examine those of the Buddha's teachings (as set out in the Pali *suttas*) that relate to ontological issues. I will attempt to show that the Buddha was neither a realist nor an idealist, but occupied a different ground altogether. The first two sections provide an exposition of two central Buddhist tenets, those of *dukkha* and *anatta*.

The third and fourth sections critically analyse two Buddhist doctrines that have often been interpreted in a way that makes the Buddha appear to espouse a realist or idealist position. I hope to show that neither the operation of the *khandhas* nor the Buddhist doctrine of causation justify such a conclusion.

Section six concerns itself with a notion central to the pursuit of traditional metaphysics, the inner/outer divide. In it I try to show that the *khandhas* can be seen as an attempt to refute this division, showing the Buddha to be anti-metaphysical.

THE FIRST NOBLE TRUTH: *DUKKHA*

The unsatisfactory nature of reality

The first teaching traditionally said to be given by the Buddha after his enlightenment was that of the four Noble Truths, and of these the first and philosophically most important is that of *dukkha*. As with many Pali terms, it is difficult to find a translation which captures the full variety of senses of the original word. It is the negation of the term *sukkha*, which expresses well-being, and which can (like *dukkha*) be used both about a subject and about an objective state of affairs[2]. Perhaps the most best rendering is 'unsatisfactoriness', although the term covers a range stretching from extreme suffering to mild perturbedness, as well as expressing (amongst others) the concepts 'emptiness' and 'insubstantiality'[3].

According to the Buddha, then, existence is unsatisfactory. This is usually interpreted in two ways. First of all, there is the obvious empirical truth that we experience the unsatisfactoriness of life both directly, when we suffer pain or distress, and indirectly, due to change. The latter arises since we become attached to all kinds of objects and experiences, and because everything is impermanent, when these objects cease to be, we feel pain at their loss.

The *Khandhas*

The second, and perhaps more philosophically important, definition of *dukkha* is that it is the five *khandhas*, or aggregates: "O bhikkhus, what is *dukkha*? It should be said that it is the five aggregates of attachment".[4] The *khandhas* are said to comprise the elements of a living being. They are the aggregate of matter (*Rūpakkhandha*), although the term *rūpa* also includes such notions as 'mobility', 'temperature' and

---

[2] It is obviously no accident that *dukkha* straddles this subjective/objective divide.
[3] Rahula, 1974, p17.

'fluidity', and it has been argued that it includes the concept 'living things' rather than just simply 'flesh'[5]; that of affective reactions (*Vedanākkhandha*), which are of three kinds (pleasure, pain and neutral), and are generated by the contact of the five physical senses and the mind with the external world; that of perceptions (*Saññākkhandha*), which again are of six kinds, and are produced by the conceptualisation of sensations; that of mental formations (*Saṃkhārakkhandha*), which includes "all volitional activities"[6], of which the Theravādin Abhidhamma lists 50, and which produce *karma*; and that of consciousness (*Viññāṇakkhandha*), "which has one of the six faculties … as its basis, and one of the six corresponding external phenomena … as its object".[7] It should be noted that at this stage the term 'mind' is not being used to refer to something ontologically separate from matter, but rather to a sixth faculty, which has ideas and thoughts as its object (this peculiar-seeming claim will be explored later).

What is the point of this fivefold division? What is its justification? The usual interpretation provided is that it points to the doctrine of *anātman* (*anatta* in Pali), or not-self. The rest of this section will be taken up in a critique of this standard Theravādin analysis, while the next but one will examine an alternative explanation.

Putting the cart before the horse

The Buddha taught that the self is like a cart: there are various things that make up the cart, but there is no one thing that one can point to that is the cart, apart from the sum of the parts.[8] In this analogy, the *khandhas* are like the parts that make up the cart.

---

[4] S III p158.
[5] Hamilton, (forthcoming, 1998).
[6] Rahula (1974) p22.
[7] Ibid, p23.
[8] S I 135.

According to Dr Hamilton, "Theravāda Buddhists understand the cart analogy as offering sufficient explanation of the point of the *khandha* teaching"[9]

It can be seen that the usual interpretation of the purpose of the *khandhas* rests on two premises: first that "whatever is impermanent is *dukkha*", and secondly that the *khandhas* are impermanent. Since the *khandhas* are an exhaustive analysis of the self, there is thus no permanent and abiding self to be found.

There are, however, several problems with this analysis. First, it provides no justification whatsoever for the doctrine of the *khandhas*. Second, according to the Buddha, *everything* is impermanent. So obviously the self, however we analyse it, is going to be impermanent. The analysis of the self in terms of the *khandhas* is thus a redundant step in the argument thus characterised. Finally, such an analysis seems to be rather out of step with the usual teachings the Buddha gives, which are more to do with how things work rather than how they are.[10]

ANĀTMAN, THE DOCTRINE OF NO SELF

What is being denied?

The Buddha's theory of *anātman* is perhaps the most counterintuitive teaching he gives. As a result, it continues to be the subject of much debate both among Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike. The teaching can be summed up as follows: there is no permanent, immanent thing that is the self. This can perhaps best be seen as a reaction to Upaniṣadic teachings, which hold that there is a permanent self or *ātman*, which is in fact identical with Brahman, a sort of universal self, or Reality as it really is (an adequate investigation of Brahman is impossible here, and, of course, it being

[9] Hamilton, op. cit.

transcendent, impossible *tout court*). Thus the Buddha is not to be denying that there is a self in the everyday sense that I point to my body and say “this is me” (in fact, the Buddha subscribes readily to the idea of bodily continuity as a criterion of personal identity in the everyday sense in which we use it: he says that it would be “better … if the common worldling approached this body … as the Self rather than the mind” since “that which we call *viññāṇa* … *manas* … *citta*, that arises as one thing, ceases as another, both by night and by day”[11]).

However, in accepting this viewpoint, it is important to distinguish it from an apparently similar position: materialism. Now while the Buddha is anxious to deny that there is any kind of mind or self that is ontologically distinct from matter[12], “it would be odd indeed if Buddhists were supposed to have to tread the entire path right up to the attainment of Arahantship merely in order to finish up with that total obliteration which the materialists, and many ordinary people today, assume to occur for all of us, good, bad, and indifferent, at the end of our present life”[13]. The difference between the Buddha’s view and that of materialism lies in his characteristic methodology, which is to eschew metaphysical speculation in favour of an epistemologically based soteriology. The difference between materialism and the Buddha’s teachings will be examined critically towards the end of the chapter. First though, it is important to see why he teaches what he does about the self, and his justification for it.

What is the purpose of the teaching of *anātman*?

I showed at the end of the last section that one standard interpretation, which is that the doctrine of *anātman* depends for its justification upon that of the *khandhas*, is

---

[10] For this last point I am indebted to Hamilton, op. cit.
[11] S II 94.

flawed. Despite this, it obviously convinced some of the Buddha's interlocutors.[14] However, the Buddha has a fall-back position, set out in the *Anattalakkhana Sutta*, which is that *anātman* depends rather upon his teachings about impermanence. Everything is impermanent, and so is anything that may comprise what we normally refer to about the self.

The target of the Buddha's teaching of *anātman* is the idea that the self is something that is separated ontologically from perceived reality, or that is in some way not subject to the same laws that govern reality. Usually when the Buddha is asked whether there is or is not a self by someone other than his *bhikkhus*, he responds by teaching the four noble truths[15]. Central to these is the idea that everything is *dukkha*, and so the *khandhas* are *dukkha*. Equally, when the Buddha is giving teachings to his *bhikkhus*, he teaches that "all *dhammas* are without self"[16]. The term 'dhamma', as is often commented, is a very wide-ranging term, including "not only the conditioned things and states, but also the non-conditioned, the Absolute, Nirvāṇa"[17]

The purpose of the teaching of *anātman* is not primarily to establish how things are, although the Buddha inevitably commits himself to a position on this issue. This is why he tends not to directly answer metaphysically-minded ascetics who question him on this matter. The motivation for the teaching of *anātman* is rather that it is only by realising that no *dhammas* are self that one can appreciate the profundity of what the Buddha says about how reality operates, the teachings of impermanence and causation.

---

[12] Cf, for example, M I 256ff.
[13] Walshe (1995), p28.
[14] e.g. in the *Cūḷasaccaka Sutta*, M I 227ff
[15] See, for example, his discussion with Poṭṭhapāda in the *Poṭṭhapāda Sutta,* D I 187ff.
[16] Dhp 279

So the justification for the doctrine of *anātman* rests not on that of the *khandhas*, but on what the Buddha has to say about *dhammas*, about reality. His teachings on this matter will be discussed shortly. First, though, it is necessary to see how the *khandhas* fit into the Buddha's system.

THE *KHANDHAS*: AN ALTERNATIVE INTERPRETATION

The place of the *khandhas*

The *khandhas* clearly occupy a central place in the Buddha's teachings. However, given the above negative critique of their usual place, some alternative explanation needs to be provided. Dr Hamilton, in a recent series of papers[18], has provided a lucid and thoroughgoing analysis of the place of the *khandhas* in Buddhist philosophy. The Buddha's primary interest is soteriological, and the *khandhas* are the key to becoming enlightened, for they explain how and why we experience the world the way we do. Upon truly comprehending the nature of reality, it is possible to attain nirvana.

Dr Hamilton contends that "the central orientation of all of the teachings of early Buddhism is the need to understand how personal continuity operates (so that one can achieve liberation from that continuity) and that this is not achieved by focussing on what one is or is not … the starting place for such an enterprise is one's own cognitive apparatus"[19]. This ties in with the concept of *dukkha* as follows: the fact of *dukkha* "is a truth statement and not a value judgment: that all things are unsatisfactory is in itself neither good nor bad but just factual … the textual description of what the truth of *dukkha* refers to is summarised as follows: 'in short, it

---

[17] Rahula (1974) p58.
[18] Hamilton (forthcoming 1997), (forthcoming 1998) and (1997).
[19] Hamilton (forthcoming 1997).

is the *khandhas* that are *dukkha*'[20]. The first Noble Truth, which identifies the very heart of the focus of the whole of the Buddhist religious teachings, itself states that to be the *khandhas*, the cognitive apparatus by which we experience"[21]. It should be added that the term *dukkha* is often used as a value judgement, and in fact the statement above is slightly misleading in that one is presumably supposed to prefer the attainment of nirvana to remaining in the cycle of samsara, and hence to pursue the Buddhist *magga* (path).

An idealist interpretation?

However, some care is needed in the interpretation of the Buddha's teachings on the *khandhas*. It is possible to draw a metaphysical conclusion from the Buddha's teaching, for example, that since the *khandhas* are what produces experience, "in sorting [sense data] out it is *we* who are making manifold. Put differently, what we are doing in order to clarify and identify data is imposing separateness onto what is not separate. In Buddhist terms, we are not seeing things as they really are, but as we sort them out"[22]; or that "the entire world of conditioned phenomena, everything that is characterised in terms of the four elements, ceases (that is, *saṃsāra-nirodha*, or *nibbāna*) not 'out there' but in one's own mind"[23]

I will argue that such a conclusion fails to pay sufficient attention to the Buddha's teachings on causation, and rests on a dualist ontological premise that has no support in the Buddha's teachings. Talk of "not seeing things as they really are, but as we sort them out", for instance, assumes that there is a separate and 'real' world of 'things-in-themselves', of which our 'unreal' experience is a representation, a view

[20] Vin I 9f.
[21] Hamilton, op. cit.
[22] Hamilton, op. cit.
[23] Hamilton, op.cit.

put forward by Kant which has caused no end of controversy in western philosophy. Similarly, if this is true, then the statement that we are “imposing separateness onto what is not separate” would need additional justification, for we cannot know whether the world of things in themselves is or is not separate, or manifold, for we have no information about it whatsoever.

SUBSTANCE AND CAUSATION IN THE BUDDHA’S TEACHING

Impermanence

The Buddha taught that everything was subject to change. Nothing whatsoever was enduring. This has been interpreted as an emphasis on becoming rather than being, but like everything else the Buddha put forward, its focus is primarily experiential. Everything we experience changes all the time (although physical objects alter less rapidly than mental ones[24]). It is often argued that the perception of change relies upon an unchanging substance to which the change occurs in contradistinction. However, while it is certainly arguable that there must be something relatively changeless in our experience for us to be able to conceptualise it, it is a large step from this to the statement that there must be any sort of absolutely permanent substance, and one that is certainly not mirrored in our experience. All of the basic entities which modern physics currently postulates, for instance, are liable to decay and hence change[25].

While these considerations do not rule out the possibility of a transcendent world of substances, it certainly rules out the phenomenal one being a world of

[24] Seventeen times less, according to the Theravādins.
[25] Parallels with modern physics are always dangerous, and I will limit mine to subjects where I am certain my physics is correct and up-to-date, and that the comparison does not involve a misuse of the terminology of physics.

substances, in the strong sense of permanent substances. However, along with the doctrine of *anicca* comes a parallel argument concerning causation, and it is to this that I will now turn.

Causation

The statement that all that is causally conditioned is impermanent is so central to Buddhist doctrine that it was regarded among early Western scholars as the "Buddhist creed". A modern formulation of it runs as follows:

When A is, B is

A arising, B arises

When A is not, B is not

A ceasing, B ceases[26]

Dependent origination (*paṭiccasammupāda*) is regarded by the Buddha himself as one of his most profound teachings. However, I will not be dealing with it here, as it is perhaps best viewed as a particular application of the general framework of the Buddha's views on causation to the problem of karmic continuity, which brings out its empirical and soteriological emphasis. I will not consider it here apart from to note that it is, in fact, empirical in its scope.

The emphasis the Buddha gives to the statement that all conditioned things are impermanent is an experiential one: it "is not given as a result of metaphysical enquiry or any mystical intuition, but a straightforward judgment to be arrived at by investigation and analysis. It is founded on unbiased thought and has a purely empirical basis."[27]

---

[26] Translated by Rahula (1974) p53 from M III 63, S II 28, 95, etc.
[27] Kalupahana (1975) p83.

According to a passage in the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, causation "is synonymous with the causal nexus, for example, as between 'ignorance' and 'dispositions'. The causal nexus is said to have four main characteristics, 1) 'objectivity' (*tathatā*), 2) 'necessity' (*avitathatā*), 3) 'invariability' (*anaññathatā*) and 4) conditionality' (*idappaccayatā*)"[28]. Conditions two and four are expressed in the original formulation: necessity means that "when A is, B is", and conditionality means that "when A is not, B is not". Invariability, argues Kalupahana, does not mean "same cause, same effect", but that "there is a constant relation between causes of certain kinds and effects of certain kinds. It emphasises the constancy of relation rather than the sameness of causes and effects"[29]. Since one never observes exactly the same set of causes more than once, this is a good pitfall to avoid.

A sceptical attack

It is hard to see *prima facie* how the Buddhist doctrine of causation thus characterised avoids Hume's sceptical problem. This may be set out as follows. We believe there is a necessity associated with the sequence of events we observe; that when I drop a pen, it will go down rather than up. However, if I try this experiment, I can easily *imagine* it rising rather than falling. In addition, I *observe* no necessity in the sequence of events. What, then, could be the source of my belief that there is a necessity to causal sequences? Hume argues that the only justification for this belief is psychological necessity: it cannot be justified by an appeal to reason alone[30].

The Buddha's answer to Hume's scepticism is unusual from the perspective of western philosophy. The Buddha claims to have empirical knowledge of the necessary

---

[28] Ibid., p91.
[29] Ibid., p94.
[30] For Hume's views on causation, see Hume (1975), especially §§4,5.

connexion involved in causal sequences of events, as part of the threefold knowledge attained by anyone who has mastered the fourth *jhāna*. The first knowledge is of the practitioner's past lives; the second is "knowledge of the passing away and reappearance of beings"[31], in other words of the operation of karma on others; the third knowledge is of "the destruction of taints"[32], including the knowledge of the twelve links.

It may be responded that the Buddha could only have observed instances of karmic causation rather than the necessary connection; the response to this must be that such a suggestion does not harmonise well with the texts. Unless one is prepared to perform meditational practice and attain the fourth *jhāna*, one must accept the word of somebody who has, just as we would not quibble with a theoretical physicist about the general theory of relativity unless we had learnt about it ourselves. The notion of necessity involved here also raises problems, and these will be discussed towards the end of the next chapter.

The problem of the Udāna

Dr Hamilton makes the claim that "it is because the phenomenal world of experience is dependently originated, and therefore dependent-period, that there *must* be something else. If there were not, the phenomenal world, the world of experience, would have to be autonomous, which the Buddha's teachings both implicitly and explicitly state is not the case."[33] However, given my interpretation of the Buddhist doctrine of causation, I believe that no such claim is justified.

I would first of all question the move from saying the phenomenal world of experience is dependently originated to calling it "dependent-period". This seems to

---

[31] *Kandaraka Sutta*, M I 348.
[32] Idem.

be a non-sequitur, for the following reason. The Buddhist doctrine of causation describes processes that occur *within* the phenomenal realm. Causation of phenomena by things in themselves (what Dr Hamilton calls 'Reality') would have to be of a different nature to that which occurs phenomenally: one would be "treating causality as Kant treated his pseudo-causal notion of a 'ground' or 'basis for the world of experience— … treating it as a transcendent relation."[34] The claim that this pseudo-causation is what the Buddha teaches would seem to be a blatant misreading of the Buddha's position. There seems to be no support of a doctrine of two different kinds of causal operation in the suttas.

Dr Hamilton backs up her claim with a notorious passage from the Udāna which says that:

> There is, bhikkhus, an unborn, an unbecome, an unconstructed, an unconditioned, without which, bhikkhus, the resultant born, become, constructed, conditioned could not be known [experienced]. But because there is, bhikkhus, an unborn, an unbecome, an unconstructed, an unconditioned, the resultant born, become, constructed, conditioned can be known [experienced].[35]

This passage would support Dr Hamilton if it is read as implying the dependent origination of the world *as a whole* rather than of any and all *particular* phenomena. However, there are several problems in the interpretation of this passage which would seem to preclude a metaphysical interpretation of it such as is required by Dr Hamilton. Professor Gombrich is sceptical as to its antiquity, and adds that "it comes to us in complete isolation, with no context."[36] He concludes that "there is

---

33 Hamilton (1997).
34 Putnam (1993).
35 VIII, 3 = pp80-81, trans. in Hamilton (1997).
36 Gombrich (1996), p43.

insufficient reason to take it as ontology rather than logic: the bare argument that if there is a process it must also be possible to conceive of a cessation of that process."[37]

METAPHYSICS AND THE INNER/OUTER DIVIDE

The importance of a 'real distinction' for metaphysics

The metaphysics of realism and idealism rely on a distinction that has been central to Western philosophy since Descartes: that between the 'inner' and the 'outer'[38]. Descartes characterised this 'real distinction' as setting apart ontologically body and mind. The former's essential feature is that it is extended, the latter's that it is a thinking thing. Descartes tried (fallaciously) to argue for this on the basis that the only certain proposition is that 'I think', and that hence this would be so were all physical matter to be destroyed. Despite the obvious invalidity of Descartes' argument, this division has persisted throughout modern philosophy in one form or another (be it epistemic, ontological, or logico-linguistic), and forms the basis of the idealist-realist debate.

In modern literature, the inner/outer divide is usually cashed out epistemologically: inner experience (sensations, for example) is that which is epistemically private, which only I have access to. The outer is the physical world which everyone has epistemic access to.

For realists, the 'external' physical world, the 'outer', is mind-independent. But as we only have access to the mental world, there arises an epistemological problem concerning how we can be said to know anything about the physical world. For the idealist, the physical 'outer' world is in some way (depending on the particular

---

[37] Ibid, p43.

brand of idealism) a product of the operation of the mind. The difficulty then arises for the idealist how experience can be said to be normative, for since the mental world is by definition a product of the mind, it would seem to be *prima facie* a stroke of luck that different minds agree on their experience, unless one takes the escape-route of solipsism. This can be seen as a problem about how we establish the apparent independence of observers of objects in the world.

One important subtlety of the inner/outer divide is that it should not be interpreted in spatial terms, for space only has meaning for physical things[39]. Descartes himself was aware of this, and, unable to resolve the difficulty of how mind and body interact, left to his successors a central problem that persists to this day. For this reason, the use of terms like 'the external world' to mean the physical world are misleading.

Recent attacks

There have been two philosophers this century whose attacks on the inner/outer divide have been seminal: Wittgenstein and Heidegger. Heidegger criticised both realism and idealism for failing to investigate properly human Being (which he calls Dasein):

> If "idealism" signifies tracing back every entity to a subject or consciousness whose sole distinguishing features are that it remains *indefinite* in its Being and is best characterized negatively as 'un-Thing-like', then this idealism is no less naïve in its method than the most grossly militant realism[40].

---

[38] Empirical idealism in the Berkeleian mould in fact removes this distinction by insisting that there is only mental substance.
[39] Barring reductionist accounts in which all inner states are isomorphic to physical (and hence spatial) brain states.
[40] Heidegger (1962) p251f.

His solution was to investigate Dasein's basic ontological state, a unitary whole he called Being-in-the-World, which is a necessary condition of the ability to distinguish between inner and outer in the first place.

Wittgenstein's approach is very different, but his conclusions are similar. He cashes out the inner/outer division in terms of a public/private one. His so called 'private language argument'[41], attacks the possibility of a language whose subject-matter is exclusively the private sensations or feelings of a speaker. The argument is introduced by Wittgenstein through the example of someone who has a new sensation, and writes a sign for it down in her diary every time she experiences it. This is a situation which is readily imaginable. What is wrong with it? Well, any judgement that one is experiencing some particular thing must be rule-governed, and any rule must be normative, which in this case can only mean that it is independently verifiable. The most pressing objection against such an account is that the person can have no *internal* criterion whereby they could tell whether they were correct or incorrect in their application.

Wittgenstein's argument is, I believe, designed to show that the ability to express what seem to be *prima facie* 'private' sensations is only possible on the basis of involvement in a community. Naming private sensations cannot be set up by private ostensive definition since "a good deal of stage setting in the language is prsupposed if the mere act of naming is to make sense."[42] Wittgenstein himself voices a possible objection, and responds to it: "'But doesn't what you say come to this: there is no pain, for example, without *pain behaviour*?'—It comes to this: only of a living human being and what resembles (behaves like) a normal human being can one

---

[41] Traditionally §§243-315 of Wittgenstein (1958).
[42] Op. cit. §257.

say: it has sensations; it sees; it is blind; hears; is deaf; is conscious or unconscious."[43] And a human being is just an animal that has been socialised into a linguistic community: "words are connected with the primitive, the natural, expressions of the sensation and used in their place. A child has hurt himself and he cries; and then adults talk to him and teach him exclamations and, later, sentences. They teach the child new pain-behaviour … the verbal expression of pain replaces crying and does not describe it"[44]

Both of these philosophers saw that what is fundamental in metaphysics is the fact of being in a world, and that taking an inner/outer division as a starting point is methodologically flawed.

The *khandhas* again

The Buddha, of course, offers nothing as sophisticated as these arguments. But I believe that the teaching of the *khandhas* is an attempt to make the same point. It may seem at first that the *khandhas* can easily be divided up into mental and physical, with the former term encompassing the *arūpakkhandhas* and the latter applying to the *rūpakkhandha,* but this is not justified. The distinction between *rūpa* and *arūpa* "does not imply the ontological dualism postulated by Descartes … Rather, one might suggest that it implies that the states or processes occur at different levels on a spectrum of density[45] … Those states of processes which are designated by the term *arūpa* occur at levels of the spectrum which do not have any of the characteristics associated with *rūpa.*"[46] In fact, the fivefold division of the *khandhas* specifically *blurs the edges* between inner and outer.

---

[43] Op. cit. §281.
[44] Op. cit. §244.
[45] This is, of course, a rather vague and metaphorical claim.
[46] Hamilton (1996) p43.

There are three aspects of the teaching of the *khandhas* I wish to focus on to substantiate this claim. First, the fact the *viññāṇakkhandha* is always characterised as 'consciousness of'; second, the fact that 'mind' is given an equal ontological status to 'external' objects of the senses; and third, the non-reductionist nature of the doctrine of the *khandhas*.

There is a passage in the *Khandha Saṃyutta* where the question is put "And what, *bhikkhus*, is *viññāṇa*?"[47] The reply is: "There are these six types of *viññāṇa*: visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, and mental. When name and form arise, *viññāṇa* arises; when name and form cease, *viññāṇa* ceases."[48] This seems to suggest, argues Hamilton[49], that consciousness always arises correlative to an object. There is another passage which seems to back this up, stating that

> If the individual's eye is intact and external (visible) forms come within its range, but there is no appropriate attention, then there is no arising of the appropriate type of consciousness. But when the individual's eye is intact, external (visible) forms come within its range, and there is appropriate attention, then there is the arising of the appropriate type of consciousness.[50]

This amounts to a causal theory of perception. It has a subtlety due to the need for there to be attention for consciousness to arise, but otherwise it is a classic statement. However, it differs from Western causal theories of perception in an important way, which is that the things which are in a causal relationship are *not of a different type*.

In causal theories of perception, experience, which is my personal, privately accessible inner experience, is caused by events in the outer external world. There is a distinct boundary between the two, which the causal theory is supposed to bridge. But in early Buddhist theory, no distinction of type is made. Mental objects are given an

---

[47] S III 61.
[48] Translated in Hamilton (1996) p88.
[49] Op. cit, p88ff.
[50] M I 190 trans. in Hamilton (1996) p89.

equal footing to sense objects in Buddhist philosophy in terms of epistemic access. This is shown by the ability of enlightened beings to see the thoughts of others (in other words, that the operation of the *arūpakhandhas* is not private or inner), and by the non-distinction between 'mental' and 'physical' causation (*everything* is subject to the same causation in the Buddhist theory).

This interpretation also explains why "the physical location of the *manas*, the sixth sense, is never mentioned in the *Sutta Piṭaka* and neither the function of *manas* nor the identity of *dhammā* is clearly defined"[51]. These concepts are simply unproblematic for the Buddha. It only seems problematic for us with out preconception of an inner/outer division, which makes us believe that mental objects must be a different *type* of thing from physical objects, that they must belong to a different ontological category.

This may, as I stated earlier, lead us to believe that Buddhism is materialistic. However, materialism is a programme of eliminative reductionism. Mental states, it claims, are nothing but brain states. Such a conclusion would obviously have been otiose to the Buddha, and does not harmonise at all well with the text of the *Sutta Piṭaka*. The Buddha taught five *khandhas* for a reason, and nowhere stated that any were more 'real' than others. If the Buddha were a materialist, he would have to claim that the *Rūpakkhandha* was the only 'true' *khandha*. In fact, if there are to be ontological categories applied to Buddhist philosophy, it seems far more natural to have a fivefold rather than a twofold division.

I am not concerned here to assess the tenability of the Buddha's view, and in fact there are problems with its philosophical cogency (notably one concerning the status of the senses). However, the above points are intended to demonstrate

conclusively that the Buddha held no distinction of type, and no epistemic distinction, between inner and outer as we would understand it. This, in turn, means that it is extremely difficult for the realist-idealist debate to *get started*, and given the Buddha's central concern with soteriology, makes such a debate totally irrelevant to Buddhist philosophy.

---

[51] Hamilton (1996) p22.

CONCLUSION

In the course of this chapter I have examined four central Buddhist doctrines as laid out in the Pali *suttas*: *anatta*, the *khandhas*, causation and *anicca*. I have attempted to show that none of them support a realist or idealist interpretation. In fact, the Buddha's teachings actively *preclude* any such interpretation. The question thus arises, what *is* his metaphysical position?

Unfortunately, I believe that an agnostic conclusion has to be reached here. The material in the text is so sparse on these issues as to underdetermine any metaphysical thesis. Any attempt at reconstruction would, I believe, falsify the Buddha's teachings. And this is surely no accident, for the Buddha believed that holding views was in itself a form of attachment, and clearly states in several places that metaphysical speculation is an obstruction to the process of attaining of enlightenment.

In particular, it should be mentioned that the use of key terms such as *sañña* and *viññāṇa*[52] is so unsystematic, and the words themselves so ambiguous, as to make the reconstruction of a 'metaphysic of experience' at best tenuous, and at worst tendentious.

---

[52] Cf, for example, Jayatilleke (1963) p434f and Hamilton (1996) pp88-95.

2. THE THERAVĀDA ABHIDHAMMA

INTRODUCTION

It is useful in discussing the Theravāda tradition to distinguish between pre- and post-Buddhaghosa thought, although in reality the situation is somewhat more complex than this. The doctrines discussed in this chapter belong firmly to the post-Buddhaghosa phase.

Abhidhamma literally means 'higher teachings', and there exist both Theravāda and Mahāyāna abhidhammas. The abhidhamma is, in both cases, a systematic exposition of Buddhist philosophy as seen from the standpoint of an enlightened being. The abhidhamma teaches how things really are, or as the Theravādins have it, ultimate reality.

Compared to the absence of direct metaphysical discussion found in the suttapiṭaka, abhidhamma teachings contain a wealth of material. The following sections will analyze two key doctrines of these teachings, the doctrine of dhammas and the distinction between conventional and ultimate reality, and show that they lead to a fairly straightforwardly realist metaphysic.

Traditional Buddhist interpretators would question the separation of my treatment of the abhidhamma from that of the suttas. The argument goes that both suttas and abhidhamma are equally "authentic" teachings, and that the reason why no direct metaphysical statements are to be found in the suttas is that sutta teachings are not concerned with metaphysical issues. Many western scholars claim that the

abhidhamma teachings could not have been given by the historical Buddha, but were a later compilation and synthesis of the material in the suttas. Traditionalists would accuse such a position of conflating the sutta-abhidhamma distinction with the sūtra-śastra distinction. I wish to remain agnostic on this issue, while acknowledging my awareness of it, and will note simply that my conclusions supply no grist to either mill.

I should add that my sole primary source for this chapter is the Abhidhammattha Sangaha of Acāriya Anuruddha, generally acknowledged in the Theravadin world to be the best precis of the later interpretation of the abhidhamma, and its commentary by U Rewata Dhamma and Bhikkhu Bodhi.

THE DOCTRINE OF DHAMMAS

What is the philosophical importance of Dhammas?

The most important philosophical development of the abhidhamma is the scheme of classification of dhammas. Everything that has ever or will ever exist, claim the Theravādins (and, for that matter, the Yogācārins), is subject to this architectonic. Dhamma theory has immediate ramifications for the realist-idealist debate: "the Abhidhamma may be described as a philosophy because it proposes an ontology, a perspective on the nature of the real. This perspective has been designated the 'dhamma theory'"[53]. It is an attempt to provide a philosophical theory which incorporates the facts of *anicca*, *anatta*, and *dukkha*, and for this reason all dhammas are all regarded as impermanent, not-self, and *dukkha* (inasmuch as whatever is impermanent is *dukkha*).

---

[53] AS p3.

Dhammas "exist by reason of their own intrinsic nature". They are "the final, irreducible components of existence, the ultimate entities which result from a correctly performed analysis of experience"[54]. They "are characterised not only from the ontological angle as the ultimate existents, but also from the epistemological angle as the ultimate objects of right knowledge"[55]. It should also be mentioned that each dhamma exists only for a small fraction of a second, with physical dhammas lasting seventeen times as long as one thought-moment. The Theravādins classify the dhammas into a closed list containing 82 types, of which only one (nibbāna) is unconditioned and the rest conditioned. Of the latter, 28 are material (rūpa). Of the remaining 53, 52 are *cetasikas* or mental states, which are subdivided into *vedanā*, *saññā* and 50 types of *saṃkhāra*. The final kind of dhamma is consciousness, or *viññāṇa*.

The description given above suggests that the abhidhamma espouses a straightforwardly realist picture. There are real things, called dhammas, some of which are (crucially) physical, that exist on their own, despite requiring causal conditions to be fulfilled in order for them to arise. However, the concomitant epistemological position is slightly surprising, for it suggests that there is epistemological access to all dhammas, without any mention of the sceptical problem that occurs in realist metaphysics.

Before providing a philosophical analysis of dhamma theory, it will be useful to see how perception works in this theory in order to provide a picture of how the interaction between 'mind' and 'matter' operates.

---

[54] AS p25.
[55] AS p26.

The process of perception in the abhidhamma

A good introduction to the Theravādin theory of perception is supplied by the theory of the functions of consciousness, of which there are fourteen. However only functions three to thirteen are of interest. They are classified in the Abhidhamatta Sangaha as follows:

> (3) **Adverting (āvajjana)** : When an object impinges at one of the sense doors or the mind door, there occurs a mind moment ... Immediately after this, a citta [consciousness] arises turning to the object, either at one of the five physical sense doors or at the mind door.
>
> (4-8) **Seeing, etc.**: In a cognitive process at the sense doors, after the moment of adverting, there arises a citta which directly cognizes the impingent object [which citta depends which sense, or "door", the object stimulates]. [The] functions of seeing and hearing, etc., do not refer to the cognitive acts which explicity identify the objects of sight and hearing etc., as such. They signify, rather, the rudimentary momentary occasions of consciousnes by which the sense datum is experienced in its bare immediacy and simplicity prior to all identificatory cognitive operations.
>
> (9-11) **Receiving, etc.**: In the case of a cognitive process through any of the five sense doors, following the citta that performs the functions of seeing etc., there arise in succession cittas that perform the functions of receiving ... investigatng ... and determining the object [These do not arise in mind-door only cognitive processes].
>
> (12) **Javana**: ... [literally] running swiftly ... applies to the stage of the cognitive process that immediately follow the determining stage, and consists of a series of cittas ... which "run swiftly" over the object in the act of apprehending it.
>
> (13) **Registration**: ... literally "having that object" ... [this] denotes the function of taking as object the object that had been apprehended by the javanas[56].

Before an attempt to analyse this doctrine is made, a word needs to be said on the term "door". Bodhi says

---

[56] AS p123f.

> The term "door" (*dvāra*) is used metaphorically in the Abhidhamma to denote the media through which the mind interacts with the objective world. Three doors of action are specified--body speech, and mind--the channels through which the mind acts upon the world ... Again, six doors of cognition are recognized: the six sense doors by which the citta and cetasikas go out to meet the object and by which objects enter into the range of the citta and cetasikas[57].

He adds that "five of the doors are ... the sensitive matter in each of the five sense organs". The mind-door is the *bhavanga*, the "function of consciousness by which the continuity of the individual is preserved through the duration of any single existence"[58]. However, cashing out this statement is a matter of controversy in the tradition. This apparently bizarre doctrine is intended to give content to the notion of a consciousness without having to postulate a substance which is the subject of experience. The thought is that each citta which arises in 'my' mind is caused by other cittas, or in the process of perception other dhammas, and they form an uninterrupted stream of consciousness. In the case where I am in deep sleep or otherwise unconscious, there is a flow of *bhavanga* which continues this stream. In this way some content can be given to the idea of personal identity and to the unity of consciousness.

Returning to the process of perception, the story does not end with the five-door process listed above. Once "the five door process has ceased the past sense object comes into range at the mind door and sets off many sequences of mind-door processes"[59]. Bodhi continues:

> It is in these consequent processes that distinct recognition of the object occurs; such recogition does not occur in a bare five-door process itself. An eye-door process, for example, is followed first by a conformatorial mind-door process ..., which reproduces in the mind door

[57] AS p130.
[58] AS p122f.
[59] AS p163.

> the object just perceived in the sense-door process. Then comes a process grasping the object as a whole; then a process recognizing the colour; then a process recognizing the entity; then a process grasping the name; then a process recognizing the name[60].

Some philosophical problems

The first part of the process of perception reads like a causal account. In modern terms, it seems natural to interpret it as describing the interaction between external physical objects and the brain. It then bears many similarities to modern functionalist accounts both in its individuation of mental states according to their causal rôle, and in its separation of the various activities involved in perception. Whether or not this view is accepted, a large philosophical difficulty is raised by the process of the reproduction (which is, in philosophical terms, a re-presentation) of the object in the mind-door, described just above. What exactly is the representation thus produced? From the account in AS, it appears to be an internal mental object (*ālambana/ārammaṇa*) If so, this account is subject to the same criticisms as the empiricist theories of perception proposed by the Locke, Hume, and Russell.

The most significant of these objections is the inevitability of a sceptical problem[61]: given that the physical world is obviously only accessible to our consciousness as a mental object generated by the reproduction of the physical object in the mind, what can justify our belief that our representations are faithful to the physical objects they are supposed to represent? They obviously differ in many ways (importantly, in that many mental representations are required to ascertain what the physical object *is*, hence the need to grasp the object "as a whole" stated above).

---

[60] AS p164.

[61] In fact, Wittgenstein's private language argument can also be construed as an attack on this kind of empiricist conception. Investigating this issue is, sadly, beyond the scope of this essay, although it is difficult to see how Wittgenstein's objection can be defeated.

Generalising all this, the important question is: what is the justification for the theory of dhammas? Can it defeat the objections given above? These questions will be addressed in the following section, after a discussion of substance and causation in dhamma theory.

ABHIDHAMMA, EMPIRICISM AND RATIONALISM

The writings of the Pali suttas are always presented in the form of teachings. They concentrate on what one should *do* to achieve enlightenment. The abhidhamma concentrates more on how things *are*. It does indeed act as a guide for meditation, but it has a peculiarity: the description of reality given is as it is seen by an enlightened being. The abhidhamma teaches ultimate reality, which is how things are seen from the point of view of nirvana: "The things contained in the Abhidhamma, spoken of therein, are altogether fourfold from the standpoint of ultimate reality: consciousness, mental factors, matter, and Nibbana"[62].

The characterisation of *dhammas* as essential things that exist (albeit briefly) 'by reason of their own intrinsic nature' smacks of Rationalism, and in particular Leibnizian monism. Compare this description in Leibniz's *Monadology*: "The *monad*, of which we shall speak here, is nothing but a simple substance … these monads are the true atoms of nature and, in a word, the elements of things."[63] Here, though, Leibniz and abhidhamma part ways, with the former saying of monads that "there is no conceivable way in which a simple substance could perish"[64] in contradistinction to the Buddhist theory of momentariness. Similarly, the claim that "monads have no

---

[62] AS I 2
[63] Leibniz (1973), p179.

windows, by which anything could come in or go out"[65] combined with the doctrine of the pre-established harmony is worlds apart from the Buddhist doctrine of causation, although a comparison between the two systems will prove fruitful in elucidating the Buddhist position.

The Leibnizian system is supposed to be deduced purely by the use of reason (hence Rationalism), without any need to consult experience, and only God is supposed to be able to perceive the universe in this way, which Rationalist philosophers call perceiving the world *sub specie aeternitatis*. However, this perception has an analogue in later Theravāda: perceiving the world as it really is, perceiving ultimate reality. Rationalist philosophers would however differ from Buddhists, claiming rather that humans are not able to perceive the world in this way.

This difference is crucial, in that the Buddhist claim that the world is experiencable as it really is, that *dhammas* can be perceived, allows them to describe themselves as empiricists. In addition, the view of the self held by Buddhists has far more in common with early Hume than with Leibniz, who claimed that each person had a monad which was their soul. Hume says in the Treatise rather that

> When I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and never can observe anything but the perception … If any one upon serious and unprejudic'd reflexion, thinks he has a different notion of *himself* I must confess I can reason no longer with him. All I can allow him is, that he may be in the right as well as I, and that we are essentially different in this particular. He may, perhaps, perceive something simple and continu'd, which he calls *himself*; tho' I am certain there is no such principle in me.[66]

---

[64] Idem.
[65] Idem.
[66] Hume (1978) p252.

The opposing positions of Buddhism and Leibniz concerning causation also highlights a difficulty faced by both: how these essential objects are supposed to affect each other. Leibniz claims that no such action is possible. Buddhists, however, working under the imperative to accommodate the Buddha's teachings on causation into their system, came up with some rather different solutions. According to Kalupahana,

> The later Buddhists adopted two methods for solving the problem of causal continuity created by the acceptance of a theory of moments. The first was to recognize an unchanging substratum underlying the momentary flashes of the apparent phases of *dhammā*[67]. The second was to formulate a theory of immediate contiguity (*samanatara*) and grant causal efficiency (*arthakriyā-kāritva* or *paccayatā*) to the immediately preceding *dhammā*. As will be seen …, the Sarvāstivādins adopted both these methods, while the Sautrāntikas and the later Theravādins criticized the first and adopted the second.[68]

The "unchanging substratum" in the above passage would, in the case of arūpa dhammas be something along the lines of a self-substance, although of course the Sarvāstivādins, and later the Yogācārins, denied this. Interestingly, the two solutions given above correspond well with the two suggested by Hume as a solution to the problem of accounting for personal identity (or, to be more precise, the unity of apperception) generated by his views on the self given above:

> No connexions among distinct existences are ever discoverable by human understanding … It follows, therefore, that the thought alone finds personal identity, when reflecting on the train of past perceptions, that compose a mind, the ideas of them are felt to be connected together, and naturally introduce each other. However extraordinary this conclusion may seem, it need not surprize us. Most philosophers seem inclin'd to think, that personal identity *arises* from consciousness; and consciousness is nothing but a reflected thought or perception … But all

[67] This substratum clearly had an influence on the later Yogācāra philosophers, whose store-consciousness has obvious conceptual affinities with it.
[68] Kalupahana (1975) p73.

> my hopes vanish, when I come to explain the principles, that unite our successive perceptions in our thought or consciousness … In short, there are two principles which I cannot render consistent; nor is it in my power to renounce either of them, viz. *that all our distinct perceptions are distinct existences*, and *that the mind never perceives any real connexion among distinct existences*. Did our perceptions either inhere in something simple or individual, or did the mind perceive some real connexion among them, there wou'd be no difficulty in the case.[69]

The two solutions to the problem of personal identity given in the last sentence above correspond exactly with the those given by the Sarvāstivādins, who adopted the former, and the Sautrāntikas and Theravādins, who adopted the latter. The "something simple and individual" of Hume is the "unchanging substratum" of the Sarvāstivadins. The Theravādin solution is perhaps preferable in that it allows for an impersonal view of the world which seems to accord better with the Buddha's teaching of anatta, leading to Buddhaghosa's famous statement that no doer of the deed is to be found.

It is now possible to shed some light on the sceptical problem outlined in the previous section. The key lies in the fact that attaining nirvana allows one to perceive things as they really are, to view the world *sub specie aeternitatis*. This means that one observes the necessary connexions between objective perceptions and the things that cause these perceptions, and hence can deduce the structure of the physical, external world rather than using induction, which results in the sceptical dilemma. This is not entirely unproblematic: if these connexions are necessary, they are presumably not *logically* necessary, otherwise how does one give content to the possibility that things could have been otherwise? It seems that there is no place in this deterministic picture for the thought that individuals possess freedom of will (for

[69] Hume (1978) p635f.

instance to choose to follow the Buddhist *magga* rather than, for instance, remaining a Brahmin). However, the Buddha explicitly denies in the *suttas* that this utter determinism accords with his teachings. The solution to this problem lies beyond the scope of this thesis, and in any case is unimportant to the larger metaphysical debate[70].

CONCLUSION

The main reason for claiming the Theravāda school is realist is the fact that *dhammas* exist 'by reason of their own intrinsic nature', and their explicit denial that there is a substratum underlying *dhammas* upon which they are dependent, and which would have to be arūpa given the opposition of Buddhists to reductive materialism. However, such a claim does, as can be seen, present them with certain other philosophical dilemmas, and seems to contradict in spirit the Buddha's repeated insistence that all *dhammas* are without self. In fact, as Professor Gombrich argues,

> Ontology began to creep back into Buddhism … when texts were compiled making lists of things the Buddha had referred to. These lists came to be thought of as an inventory of what the Buddha had taught to *exist*, as the building blocks of the universe. One could reduce only so far … There were many more abstract than concrete *dhammā*, and some were still the names of processes, like anger, but the list was a closed one. Thus the number of kinds of things in the world was taken to be established … Thus, while the Buddhist *abhidhamma* remained opposed to Upaniṣadic monism, in this respect its world came to resemble the brahminical world with its *sva-dharmas*. This led to Nāgārjuna's reaction against essentialism, a reaction which I believe to have been in the spirit of the Buddha's intention.[71]

---

[70] For more on the Buddhist theory of causation, see Kalupahana (1975), *passim*.
[71] Gombrich (1996) p36f.

3. YOGĀCĀRA: BUDDHIST IDEALISM

INTRODUCTION

Yogācāra, also known as Cittamātra (mind only), is one of the two major (sūtra) schools of Mahāyāna Buddhism. The Mahāyāna tradition has its own sūtras, and its own abhidharma. Although it does not, strictly speaking, possess a separate vinaya, it teaches a 'higher' set of vows, the Bodhisattva vows, which redefine the soteriology and ethics of Buddhism. All Mahāyāna schools accept both the Theravādin suttas and the Mahāyāna sūtras as being personally authorised by the Buddha[72]. They disagree, however, in which sūtras are to be taken literally, and which are to be interpreted. For the Mādhyamaka school, the *Prajñāpāramitā* (perfection of wisdom) sūtras are to be taken literally. Most others are to be interpreted. For the Yogācāra school, the sūtras to be taken literally include the *Saṃdhinirmocana sūtra*[73] and the *Lankāvatāra sūtra*[74]. Of course, each school and sub-school has, in addition to the tripitaka, its own tradition of commentaries and treatises (*śāstras*) which expound its doctrines directly.

The Yogācāra literature, like that of the Mādhyamaka school, is extremely large, and only a tiny amount of it exists in reasonable English translation. The major primary sources examined in this chapter are the *Saṃdhinirmocana sūtra*, from what

[72] For a detailed treatment of the subject of the authorisation of sūtras, see MacQueen (1981), *passim*.
[73] Translated in Powers (1995).

Griffiths terms the pre-systematic phase[75], Maitreya's[76] *Madhyāntavibhāga,* from the systematic phase, and its commentary (*bhāṣya*) by Vasubandhu. I will also be referring to other works by Vasubandhu, the chief author of the works in the third, 'classical' stage of Indian Yogācāra. The main doctrine of the Yogācāra school which differentiates it from the Mādhyamaka is that of the three aspects. This will be examined in the next section, which will be followed by a section analyzing Yogācāra ideas about the mind.

It is often claimed that Yogācāra philosophy is at worst entirely nonsensical, and at best unfaithful to the spirit of Buddhism. In particular, talk of a positive conception of emptiness, a theme that recurs throughout Yogācāra philosophical writing, tends to strike many Buddhist scholars as entirely missing the point of positing emptiness in the first place. I hope to show that Yogācāra shows a subtle philosophical sensitivity to the problem of reconciling the doctrine of emptiness with the epistemological fact that the world as perceived is anything but empty.

THE THREE ASPECTS

The three-fold nature of reality

The doctrine of the three aspects can be seen as an attempt to reconcile the doctrine of emptiness laid out in the *prajñāpāramitā* literature with the fact that we do appear to perceive a world of objects with which we are involved[77]. The three aspects of basic reality discussed in Yogācāra are the constructed (*parikalpita*), the interdependent

---

[74] Translated in Suzuki (1932).
[75] Griffiths (1986) p77.
[76] The actual authorship of the five Yogācāra works attributed to Maitreya is a matter of controversy. They were recorded by Asaṇga, and some scholars claim that he in fact wrote them.
[77] It can also be seen as "an attempt to make ontological generalizations from experiences produced by meditative practices" [Griffiths (1986) p82], hence the name Yogācāra, lit. 'the practice of Yoga'.

(*paratantra*) and the fulfilled (*parinişpanna*). It should be mentioned that these are not onotologically separate categories. They are rather different modes under which the mind can construct reality[78].

The reality of our everyday experience is the constructed aspect. In this reality is found "the discrimination of object apprehended and subject apprehendor"[79], and the world characterised in the constructed aspect is one of self and events. The "objects of sense and understanding"[80] are said to be the 'constructed own-being'[81]. Names and signs, and hence language use, are also artifacts of the constructed world, hence the claim that "in dependence upon names that are connected with signs, the constructed character is known"[82]. This reality is empty in virtue of the fact that it doesn't 'really' exist: it is simply a construction of the mind.

It will immediately be noticed that since language is 'constructed', it automatically falsifies reality[83] (i.e. the fulfilled aspect). Hence it is impossible for any philosophical discourse to correctly describe fulfilled reality. This was a fact recognised by the Yogācāra philosophers, and forms the basis of Yogācāra hermeneutics. Although Yogācāra uses its own set of conventional terms, it fully recognises that these must also ultimately be transcended. It

> is interested in showing a path, conceived in conventional terms, which leads to the abandonment of all mental constructions. The provisional constructions used by Vasubandhu

---

[78] The language of Griffiths' characterisation, "different modes under which experience can appear to the experiencer," seems to *assume* that it will appear under the constructed aspect! (Griffiths (1986) p85.)
[79] MVB p211.
[80] MVB p213.
[81] "Own-being" (*svabhāva*) is a much-used term in Yogācāra, and refers to the basic constituents of reality. So the constructed own being refers to constructed objects of experience.
[82] SN p87.
[83] This idea was first taken seriously in the Western tradition by Nietzsche: c.f. for instance Nietzsche (1974) §354. In fact the claim should perhaps be slightly weaker: we must remain *agnostic* as to whether language can be used to discuss the fulfilled aspect.

> for this purpose are however self-dissolving, since, finally, for Vasubandhu as for Nāgārjuna, there can only be ineffable Emptiness[84]

The second aspect is the interdependent. The interdependent character of phenomena "is simply the dependent origination of phenomena"[85]. It is also stated the "That which appears is the interdependent; 'how it appears' is the constructed, through the former's state of developing subject to conditions, through the latter's being construction-only."[86]

Finally, the third aspect is the fulfilled. It is "the non-being of object apprehended and subject apprehended"[87]. Its character is emptiness: "the fulfilled character of phenomena is … an 'ultimate lack of own-being' … ultimate lack of own-being is distinguished by being the selflessness of phenomena, and should be viewed as all-pervasive and unitary"[88]. This passage from the *Saṃdhinirmocana sūtra* continues by comparing the ultimate lack of own-being with space, since "[space] is distinguished by being just the lack of own-being of forms in space and as pervading everywhere"[89]. The ultimate lack of own-being is also said to be "an object of observation for purification of phenomena", although given that in the fulfilled aspect there is no discrimination between subject and object, it seems rather difficult to give any content to this claim.

The relationship between the constructed, the interdependent and the fulfilled is given by Vasubandhu as follows:

> The constructed own-being is perceived as existent, yet it is complete non-being, so it is thought of as having an existent-and-non-existent characteristic. The interdependent exists, but

---

[84] Anacker (1998) p273.
[85] SN p81.
[86] TSN p291.
[87] MVB p213.
[88] SN p101.
[89] Idem.

> not in the way that it appears, there being confusion there, so it is thought of as having an existent-and-non-existent characteristic. The fulfilled own-being exists through non-duality, but is simply the non-being of 'two': so it is thought of as having an existent-and-non-existent characteristic too.[90]

One important point about the fulfilled aspect is that it is emptiness. It seems *prima facie* bizarre, however, that emptiness, about which the Mādhyamakas refuse to make any kind of statement, can be positively characterised.

Emptiness and the fulfilled

For the Yogācārins, one 'views' things under the fulfilled aspect when one attains enlightenment. This is termed the "non-dual awareness of enlightened ones"[91], and both this and the 'knowledge' of other's *cittas*, "because of their inherent non-knowledge, are not like an object, because it is through the state of an appearance of something which appears differently than it does later that there is a state of non-abandonment of the discrimination betwen object apprehended and subject apprehendor."[92]

What can be said about this non-dual awareness, and consequently about the fulfilled own-being?

> It is not empty, either because of emptiness or the imagination of the unreal[93]. Neither is it non-empty, because of the duality, object apprehended and subject apprehendor, and thus it has been taught, that "Everything compounded is called 'the imagination of the unreal'; everything uncompounded is called 'Emptiness'", because of the existence of the imagination of the unreal, because of the non-existence of duality, and the existence of emptiness in the imagination of the unreal, and the existence of the imagination of the unreal in emptiness. And

[90] TSN p292.
[91] VK p174.
[92] Idem.
[93] 'The imagination of the unreal' (*abhūtaparikalpa*) is an oft-used technical term in Yogācāra, applied sometimes to the interdependent aspect, sometimes to the constructed aspect.

> *this* is the Middle Path: that everything is neither totally empty nor totally non-empty. And this is in accordance with passages in the *Prajñā-pāramitā-sūtras*, etc., which say: "All this is neither empty nor non-empty"[94].[95]

A correlative passage on emptiness states that its characteristics should be known as follows:

> It is the non-being of duality, i.e. of the object apprehended and subject apprehendor. It is also the being of this non-being. In this way, emptiness' characteristicness of both non-being and own-being is illuminated. As it is both non-being and own-being, it is "neither a being nor a non-being". How is it not being? Because of the non-being of duality. How is it not non-being? Because of the being of the non-being of duality. And this is the characteristic of emptiness. Thus it is "a characteristic neither the same nor different" from the imagination of the unreal.[96]

What is the fulfilled?

In both cases, we have something that is not a no-thing, but which defies any attempt at a positive characterisation. Since nothing can be predicated of it, it is not an object, and so it has no objective being. This 'thing' is the fulfilled own-being. It is empty of inherent existence, since for anything that we say exists, there must be an empirical criterion for applying the concept of it[97]. We can infer the existence of sub-atomic particles, although we cannot observe them directly. The 'thing' is *in principle* unidentifiable. In Yogācāra thought this is true *ex hypothesi* since any identification of an object requires the "discrimination of object apprehended" which is a characteristic of the constructed aspect. Why is this bizarre 'thing' postulated at all? Well, if the constructed aspect isn't real, if it's a construction of the mind, there must be something which is the ground of this construction, although we are not yet in a

---

94 C.f. *Kauśila-prajñā-pāramitā-sūtra.*
95 MVB p212.
96 MVB p217.
97 This is the principle of significance, set out by Strawson in *The Bounds of Sense*, Strawson (1966) p16.

position to say what kind of thing this ground might be. However, it has a close parallel in the Western philosophical tradition.

Some commentators, for instance Williams[98], take passages such as those above to indicate that "this school, therefore, holds that something exists"[99], and that "thus we have a reinterpretation of the notion of emptiness, which has ceased to mean 'absence of inherent existence' …The fundamental opposition is [now] emptiness versus subject-object dichotomy."[100] My view is that the Yogācāra position is more subtle than this. For them, the term existence, like all terms, is a conventional one. What is fundamental in Yogācāra is the interdependent aspect viewed under the fulfilled aspect, and it is repeatedly stated that it is neither the case that this exists, nor is it the case that it doesn't exist. What could be the meaning of this?

Emptiness and the transcendent

Kant's project in the *Critique of Pure Reason* is to justify the possibility of synthetic *a priori* knowledge. In doing so, he attempts to show that there are *a priori* constraints on what kind of experience is possible. Such conditions of the possibility of experience Kant terms *transcendental*. Experience, argues Kant, must be spatiotemporal, subject to causal laws, and so on.[101] The only way that these transcendental conditions can be *a priori* is if they are applied by the mind in the construction of experience.

The phenomenal world thus formed by the operation of the mind (in the form of the operation of the faculty of sensible intuition and the faculty of judgement,

---

[98] Following Mi-pham, who claims that "all entities of reality are subsumed under mere experience, and that the cognitive event devoid of both an objective and a subjective determinant exists really in an absolute sense", quoted in Guenther (1971) p113.
[99] Williams (1989) p86.
[100] Idem.

according to Kant's transcendental psychology) is the physical, empirical world we are part of. However, surely the world would exist if we weren't here to observe it, and so there must be some content to the concept of things as they are prior to the operation of the mind in constructing experience. This problem clearly troubled Kant, for he often talks of how things are in themselves. He characterises the thing-in-itself in two apparently different ways, first as being an ontologically distinct 'ground' or 'basis' of the phenomenal world; and second as that which would be left if we were able, *per impossibile*, to take the phenomenal world and 'strip off' the contribution of the mind[102]. Which of the two is supposed to be fundamental, and whether the two doctrines can be reconciled, is a matter of continuing debate[103].

Either way, one can say nothing *positive* about things as they are in themselves, because our experience is necessarily bound by the conditions applied in the operation of the mind in constructing experience. However, the concept of things as they are in themselves is clearly not without some content. The analogy with Yogācāra philosophy is, I believe, as follows: the world viewed under the constructed aspect is Kant's phenomenal world. The world in its interdependent aspect is things as they are in themselves. But when we strip away the contribution of the mind in constructing the world of phenomena, we attain an awareness of the world in its fulfilled aspect. This would correspend roughly to the noumenal awareness the Kant occasionally and rather obscurely discusses.

This interpretation requires that one adopts the second of Kant's proposals for things as they are in themselves, viz. that the thing-in-itself is what remains once the

---

[101] Experience is, for Kant, subject to the twelve categories (Kant (1929) A80/B106), and the forms of sensible intuition (i.e. space and time).

[102] There is an obvious tension here between the idea that the world is mind-constructed and the need to assume that the world could still exist without minds. There is no space to explore it here, but clues as to its resolution may be gathered from the final part of the next section.

contribution of the mind is subtracted from phenomena. It should be noted that is simply not possible for humans according to Kant. The world is always necessarily phenomenal (constructed) for us. Only for God, or a being who had a noumenal (purely intellectual and non-sensible[104]) faculty of intuition could one directly 'perceive' things as they are in themselves.

However, under Yogācāra, one trains the mind through meditation to view the world in a non-dual way, and finally the practitioner "produce[s] the ability to understand the interdependent character. In future lives they achieve cessation through cutting off the continuum."[105] Understanding the interdependent character means to be aware of the world under the fulfilled aspect, although in doing so one is (importantly) also able to view it under the other aspects too. The fact that this is so resolves the problem Griffiths poses, which is how an enlightened being goes about having compassion for other beings, who are of course part of constructed reality. The answer is that of course in attaining enlightenment, and hence the fulfilled aspect, one still has the ability to perceive the constructed.

The interpretation I have sketched explains why the fulfilled and the constructed are often spoken of as being "neither exactly different nor non-different from the interdependent."[106] For phenomena are a *representation* of things as they are in themselves, which are neither different nor non-different from the phenomena that represent them[107]. The same is true for someone who has attained the awareness of the fulfilled aspect: they are aware of the interdependent aspect, but not through the

---

[103] See, for instance, chapter 11 of Allison (1983).
[104] 'Sensible' is a technical term for objects that are presented to us by the faculty of sensible intuition, i.e. sense-data (understood rather specifically—what is to be understood by 'sense data' is still the subject of much controversy in contemporary philosophy: see McDowell (1996) *passim*).
[105] SN p111.
[106] TK p188.

representation of phenomena which is necessarily connected with the dual awareness of subject (in the form of the transcendental unity of apperception in Kantian terms) and object.

However, this leaves open the possibility of reconciling Kant with Yogācāra. For the premise of the argument that the world as perceived is necessarily phenomenal rests on the premise of the transcendental unity of apperception, which is (loosely speaking) the claim that one must be able to be conscious of oneself *qua* subject. However, the Yogācāra claim, and for that matter the Buddhist claim *tout court*, is *exactly* that when one attains the fulfilled, enlightenment, one no longer discriminates between subject apprehendor and object apprehended, in other words that one is *no longer* conscious of oneself *qua* subject, in contradistinction to a world of objects. This is, in Yogācāra terms, simply the doctrine of *anatta*[108].

The Yogācāra school, like Kant, also has a positive thesis about the thing-in-itself, although it is a rather different one. In order to elucidate this positive claim, it is necessary to examine the Yogācāra theory of mind, and in particular the doctrine of the store-consciousness (*ālaya-vijñāna*).

THE YOGĀCĀRA CONCEPT OF MIND

Seeds and the Store-consciousness

According to Anacker, Vasubandhu "regards both affliction (the constructed) and alleviation (the fulfilled) as aspects of one constantly changing interdependent stream of events."[109] This can be seen in his attitude to how constructed phenomena arise: "a perception with the appearance of visibles arises through a special transformation (in

---

[107] This is, in the style of Yogācāra, to some extent a piece of sophistry. Representations are clearly different from what is represented, and yet there is, *ex hypothesi*, some kind of relation between the two.
[108] I am indebted to Rory Madden for this point.

the consciousness-series). In respect to such a perception, the Exalted One spoke in terms of the sense-field of the eye and of visibles, in respect to the seed and the appearance which arises, respectively."[110] The same holds for perceptions due to other senses.

For Vasubandhu,

> The metaphors of 'self' and 'events' which develop in so many different ways take place in the transformation of consciousness: and this transformation is of three kinds: maturation, that called 'always reflecting', and the perception of sense-objects.[111]

Of these, the most important is maturation, which is due to "'the store-consciousness' which has all the seeds. Its appropriations, states, and perceptions are not fully conscious, yet it is always endowed with contacts, mental attentions, feelings, cognitions and volitions."[112] This 'store-consciousness'

> is only all the seeds, and transformation takes place in such and such a way, according to a reciprocal influence, by which such and such a type of discrimination may arise. The residual impressions of actions, along with the residual impressions of a 'dual' apprehension, cause another maturation (of seeds) to occur, where the former maturation has been exhausted.[113]

Of course, the 'store-consciousness' and 'seeds' are only a metaphor for the transformation of consciousness. With reference to the terms 'compounded' and 'uncompounded', Vasubandhu notes that

> 'Cause' is the store-consciousness that takes up the seeds ('seeds' being a metaphor for latent potency in the residual impressions). 'Preparatory factors' are the environment, body, and objects of experience, along with *manas*, apprehension and discrimination included in the evolving consciousness. *Manas* is that consciousness (linked with the idea of 'I' etc.) whose mode of existence is to be always reflecting. 'Apprehension' is the five consciousnesses of

---

[109] Anacker (1998) p273.
[110] VK p165.
[111] TK p186.
[112] Idem.
[113] TK p188.

> seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching. 'Discrimination' is the sixth consciousness, because it discriminates all these objects. Designations, causes, preparatory factors, and the events associated with the store-consciousness, *manas*, the five sensuous consciousnesses, and the sixth consciousness, are 'the compounded'.[114]

It is easy to see the influence of the abhidhamma here, with the store-consciousness playing a rôle analogous to that which the *bhavanga* occupy in Theravādin philosophy.

The place of the store-consciousness and seeds in Yogācāra philosophy is probably best elucidated by a metaphor used in the *Saṃdhinirmocana sūtra*. In this thought-experiment, a magician "after gathering grasses, leaves, twigs, pebbles or stones, displays various magical forms, such as a herd of elephants, a cavalry, chariots, and infantry; collections of gems, pearls, lapis lazuli, conch-shells, crystal and coral."[115] People watching this may think that these illusions actually exist, and "subsequently they make the conventional designations: 'This is true, the other is false'."[116] Those who realise the nature of the illusions "emphatically apprehend and emphatically assert in accordance with how they see and hear. Subsequently they do not make the conventional designations: 'This is true, the other is false.' They make conventional designations because they fully know the object in this way."[117]

According to Wong-chuk[118], "the magician is compared to the store-consciousness, which from beginningless time has created things that are unreal. The magician's skillful assistants are compared to the seven collections of consciousness, which are subordinate to the basis-consciousness. The sticks and stones that serve as

---

[114] MVB p244f.
[115] SN p15.
[116] SN p17.
[117] Idem.
[118] *Ārya-gambhīra-saṃdhinirmocana-sūtra-ṭīkā*, in the Karmapae Choedhay edition of the sDe-dge bsTan-'gyur, vol. ti [118]:238.3, 239.3.

the basis of the magician's illusory creations are compared to the seeds in the store-consciousness. The jewels and horses that the audience percieves are like fruits."[119]

Griffiths characterises what he calls the 'seed-tendency theory' as follows: "this theory suggests that an agent's actions sow seeds in that agent's store consciousness; these seeds in turn produce—or, perhaps more accurately, simply are—tendencies, character traits, future possibilities of action. They are located in the store-consciousness and will mature and have their effects upon the functions and activities of the agent in the future"[120].

The store-consciousness and the transcendent

Griffiths sees the place of the store-consciousness in Yogācāra thought as an attempt

> to provide a picture by means of which Buddhist thinkers could try to make sense of the experienced facts of the continuity of personal identity, such things as memory, continuity of character traits, the continuing sense that each person has of himself as identifiably an individual, identifiably different from other individuals and identifiably the same person as he was in the past.[121]

Such facts are also necessary to explain the possibility of karma. Importantly, though, the store-consciousness, like the interdependent aspect, is *transcendent*. That is to say, it cannot be an object of (phenomenal) experience, nor can its existence be inferred. It does not conform to the principle of significance, which states that "there can be no legitimate, or even meaningful, employment of ideas or concepts which does not relate them to empirical or experiential conditions of their application."[122] This is to say, in Yogācāra terms, the store-consciousness is not experiencable in the constructed aspect. This has two important consequences. First, any talk of the store-

[119] Powers (1995) p318f.
[120] Griffiths (1986) p93.
[121] Griffiths (1986) p91.

consciousness and seeds must be purely metaphorical. Vasubandhu is quite happy to admit this, as we have already seen. However, no serious philosophical work can be done with metaphors. So questions such as "where … are the seeds located while they are ripening?"[123] are fruitless.

The second, and perhaps more important, consequence is that there is no possibility of individuating the store-consciousness from the interdependent aspect. The only possibility is to accept that, like the interdependent aspect, the store-consciousness is a synonym for how things are in themselves. This means that we cannot talk about the permanence or otherwise of the store-consciousness, nor is there any content to claims such as "the store-consciousness … is the cause of the interdependent aspect of experience, since it is only in virtue of the seeds and tendencies accumulated in the store-consciousness that conscious experience can occur at all."[124] This does not mean that one cannot *talk* about the store-consciousness, seeds and so on, only that one must accept that any such discourse is purely metaphorical.

Vasubandhu clearly realised something along these lines, as indicated by the closing verses of the *Triṃśikā-kārikā*:

> As long as consciousness is not situated within consciousness-only, the residues of a 'dual' apprehension will not come to an end. And so even with the consciousness: 'All this is perception-only', because this also involves an apprehension, for whatever makes something stop in front of it isn't situated in 'this-only'. When consciousness does not apprehend any object-of-consciousness, it's situatied in 'consciousness-only', for without the non-being of an object apprehended, there is no apprehension of it.[125]

---

[122] Strawson (1966) p16.
[123] Griffiths (1986) p93.
[124] Griffiths (1986) p95.
[125] TK p188f.

This amounts to saying that any judgement, any apprehension, clearly falsifies reality, even the judgement that "all this is consciousness-only".

The positive claims about the store-consciousness, then, are not to be taken seriously philosophically, although they can be used metaphorically. It is obvious, however, that many Yogācāra philosophers *do* take them literally (as the *Saṃdhinirmocana Sūtra* somewhat ironically urges us to). In doing so, they are making positive claims that they are not entitled to.

Finally, something must be said of the tension between Yogācāra teachings and those of the Buddha. The Buddha claims that all consciousness is consciousness *of* (which Griffiths calls, following Brentano, an "intentional model" of consciousness[126]). This means, simply, that every consciousness must have an object. This is not a problem for experiencing reality under the constructed aspect, where all experience involves a discrimination of subject and object. However, it presents more of a difficulty under the fulfilled aspect, where there is, *ex hypothesi*, no such discrimination. Unfortunately, it is impossible to make any positive statements about the awareness of the fulfilled, so any notion of intentionality under it can only be metaphorical. Even so, it seems bizarre to apply such a notion to a situation where there is no-one to have intentionality as such.

One escape clause, which is slightly cheap, is to say that one simply cannot apply conventional terms to the fulfilled. The rNying-ma-pas, however, postulate "a faculty which is capable of discerning the ultimate[127], and in order to be able to discern the ultimate, man must, in some way, partake of the ultimate. The latter is known by its Indian designation *dharmakāya* (*chos-sku*) and the faculty that is

[126] Griffiths (1986) p80. C.f. Brentano (1973) *passim*.

capable of discerning it is known as *rig-pa*"[128]. There is no space to go into this claim here, although it seems to rest upon an interpretation of the fulfilled as pure aesthetic experience which is reminiscent of Schopenhauer's development of Kantian philosophy[129].

CONCLUSION

In what sense, then, is Yogācāra idealist? The experience of the constructed aspect is, in that it is mentally constructed, empirically ideal[130]. Care is needed with this though, since Yogācāra in no way accords with Berkeleian idealism. The major difference between Yogācāra and other forms of empirical idealism is the possibility of attaining the awareness of the interdependent under the fulfilled aspect. In fact, Yogācāra philosophy claims that *this* is truly reality.

The question then arises, is it mind-independent? If the store-consciousness is seriously to be equated with this reality in some way, then one must come to the conclusion that Yogācāra is idealist, since mind is all there is. But to describe this reality as mental is to speak figuratively, and the label 'idealist' is misleading, since to use the word 'mental' to describe the store-consciousness is to stretch it well beyond its normal use.

However, one can claim more reasonably, and this is perhaps the crux of the matter, that since this reality is attainable through meditation, it must be in some sense

---

[127] In fact, for all Buddhists there must be some factor which allows one to attain nirvana, but the rNying-ma-pa *rig-pa* is one of the most philosophically sophisticated attempts to cash this out.
[128] Guenther (1971) p96.
[129] For which see Schopenhauer (1958) *passim*.
[130] The Kantian claim of empirical reality for the phenomenal world rests on the fact that the categories and forms of intuition are *necessary* conditions of experience, which cannot be claimed for the constructed.

mental, and hence mind-dependent. But it is certainly not empirical reality, the world of sense-data (understood broadly) experienced by a subject. Thus the 'idealism' of Yogācāra has no clear parallel in Western philosophy, despite the structural similarity of certain aspects of it with Kantian thought.

CONCLUSION

The realist-idealist debate in Buddhist philosophy is not, as is established in chapter one, entered into in the Buddha's original teachings in the Pali suttas. However, metaphysical issues which have direct consequence for this debate were certainly being discussed by contemporaries of the Buddha, and it was not long before Buddhists began to investigate the metaphysical consequences of their own doctrines.

The scholars of the early, non-Mahāyāna schools spent much of their time producing a systematization of the Buddha's teachings, resulting in the abhidhammapiṭaka of the Pali canon (the core of which is supposed to have been taught by the Buddha during his lifetime), and its later developments at the hands of Buddhaghosa and his successors. This venerable scholastic tradition was continued by Mahāyāna Buddhists, many of whose works concern themselves at least partly with metaphysical and ontological issues. So all major schools of Buddhism commit themselves to a position which can be broadly interpreted as a form of realism or idealism.

In this thesis, the philosophical teachings of two major schools have been critically examined. The schools chosen were ones whose central teachings commit them to an obvious stance on the overall debate. The Theravādins, by claiming that some dhammas are mind-independent, and that all dhammas possess an intrinsic causal power, are clearly realists, although their particular brand of realism has no analogue in the Western tradition. The Yogācārins, in claiming that transcendent

reality is in some sense cognizable through meditative practice, establish themselves to be idealists.

It is important, however, to be clear on the substantial differences between the Buddhist and Western traditions. The Buddhist concept of mind is, as has been seen, a rather different one from that of Occidental schools. In addition, Buddhists are not terribly concerned about the external, physical world except inasmuch as it is important soteriologically.

Hence the Buddhist tradition has not come to embrace realism as being the only philosophical position that doesn’t make physical science miraculous, as modern Western philosophers have tended to. Indeed, later Buddhist philosophers have often taken the opposite view, which is that some form of idealism is the only philosophy that doesn’t make the attainment of nirvana a miracle.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary texts (Buddhist and Hindu)

Anacker, S. trans. (1998), *Seven Works of Vasubandhu* (second edition). Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

Bhikkhu Bodhi ed. (1993), *A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma*. Colombo: Buddhist Publication Society.

Horner, I. trans. (1938-66), *The Book of Discipline*. London: Pali Text Society.

Limaye, S. trans. (1992), *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra*. Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications.

Nāgārjuna (1995), *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, trans. Garfield. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Narada Thera trans. (1954), *The Dhammapada*. London: John Murray.

Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi trans. (1995), *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha.* Boston: Wisdom Publications.

Olivelle, P. trans. (1996), *Upaniṣads.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Powers, J. trans. (1995), *Wisdom of Buddha*. Berkeley: Dharma Publications.

Rhys Davids, C. and Woodword, F. trans. (1917-30), *The Book of Kindred Sayings*. London: Pali Text Society.

Walshe, M. trans. (1995), *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.

Primary texts (Western Philosophy)

Berkeley, G. (1975), *Philosophical Works*. London: J. M. Dent.

Descartes, R. (1988), *Selected Philosophical Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Heidegger, M. (1962), *Being and Time*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Hume, D. (1978), *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hume, D. (1975), *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kant, I. (1929), *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Kemp Smith. London: Macmillan.

Leibniz, G. (1973), *Philosophical Writings* (second edition), trans. Morris and Parkinson. London: J. M. Dent.

Nietzsche, F. (1974), *The Gay Science*, trans. Kaufmann. New York: Vintage.

Schopenhauer, A. (1958), *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. Payne. New York: Dover.

Wittgenstein, L. (1958), *Philosophical Investigations* (second edition). Oxford: Blackwell.

Secondary sources

Allison, H. (1983), *Kant's Transcendental Idealism*. London: Yale University Press.
Brentano, F. (1973), *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*. London:
Collins, S. (1982), *Selfless Persons*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Conze, E. (1962), *Buddhist Thought in India*. London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd.
Evans, G. (1982), *The Varieties of Reference*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
Gombrich, R. (1996), *How Buddhism Began: the Conditioned Genesis of the Early Teachings*. London: Athlone
Griffiths, P. (1986), *On Being Mindless*. La Salle: Open Court.
Guenther, H. (1971), *Buddhist Philosophy in Theory and Practice*. London: Shambhala.
Hamilton, S. (1996), *Identity and Experience*. London: Luzac Oriental.
——— (1997), "The Dependent Nature of the Phenomenal World," in *Recent Researches in Buddhist Studies*, ed. Dhammajoti *et al*., Hong Kong: Chi Ying Foundation.
——— (forthcoming, 1997), "The Centrality of Experience in the Teachings of Early Buddhism".
——— (forthcoming, 1998), "The *Khandas*: Body, Mind and the Religion of Early Buddhism".
Jayatilleke, K. (1963), *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*. London: George Allen and Unwin.
Kalupahana, D. (1975), *Causality: the Central Philosophy of Buddhism*. Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii.
MacQueen, G. (1981), "Inspired speech in early Mahāyāna Buddhism I", in *Religion*, 11, pp303-19.
McDowell, J. (1996), *Mind and World*, London: Harvard University Press.
Morrison, R. (1997), *Nietzsche and Buddhism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Nagao, G. (1991), *Madhyamika and Yogācāra*. Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications.
Parkes, G. (1987), *Heidegger and Asian Thought.* Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
——— (1991), *Nietzsche and Asian Thought.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Putnam, H. (1993), "Realism without Absolutes" in *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, 1, pp179-192.
Rahula, W. (1959), *What the Buddha Taught*. New York: Grove Press.
Strawson, P. (1966), *The Bounds of Sense*. London: Routledge.
Williams, P. (1989), *Mahāyāna Buddhism.* London: Routledge.
Stcherbatsky, Th. (1993), *Buddhist Logic*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

Abbreviations

D Dīgha Nikāya of the Suttapiṭaka of the Pali Canon, translated in Walshe (1995).
M Majjhima Nikāya of the Suttapiṭaka of the Pali Canon, translated in Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi (1995).
S Saṃyutta Nikāya of the Suttapiṭaka of the Pali Canon, translated in Rhys Davids and Woodword (1917-30).
AS Abhidhammattha Sangaha by Bhadanta Anuruddhacāriya, translated in Bodhi (1993).
MVB Madhyānta-vibhāga-bhāṣya by Vasubandhu, including the Madhyānta-vibhāga of Maitreyanatha, translated in Anacker (1998) pp211-286.
VK Viṃśatikā-kārikā and its commentary, both by Vasubandhu, translated in Anacker (1998) pp157-179.
TK Triṃśikā-kārikā by Vasubandhu, translated in Anacker (1998) pp181-190.
TSN Tri-Svabhāva-Nirdeśa by Vasubandhu, translated in Anacker (1998) pp291-296.
SN Saṃdhinirmocana Sūtra, translated in Powers (1995).
Dhp Dhammapada of the Suttapitaka of the Pali Canon, translated in Narada (1954).
Vin Vinayapitaka of the Pali Canon, translated in Horner (1938-66).